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ABSTRACT

There is a growing need in the field of teacher education to bridge the gap between theory and practice while creating dialogue for exploration, change, and growth. Proactive teacher educators should seek change in traditional inservice training and create more authentic and empowering professional development opportunities that are proactive as well as effective. A proposed model of professional development bearing the acronym PROFESSIONAL has been developed. It focuses on: Preparing teachers by disseminating research or projects; providing teachers with opportunities to Reflect; using meeting and planning time for teachers to Observe proposed projects or issues; helping teachers Focus on issues; allowing teachers to Explore, Share, and Show experiences and options with colleagues; helping teachers Incorporate projects or reform efforts based on classroom experiences; promoting ongoing One-on-one discourse among teachers and coordinators; following up with Negotiating (Networking); and encouraging the premises of negotiation to stem from Action research which will help in Legitimizing teachers' concerns and efforts thus empowering them as professionals. Teacher research is a productive avenue for professional development. PROFESSIONAL challenges proactive teacher educators to comprehensively examine multiple avenues of assisting teachers with reform efforts and assuring effective professional development. (SM)

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Proactive Teacher Educators: Needed Vehicles for Education Reform

by

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Abstract

This paper addresses issues and concerns of professional development (i.e. teacher training and in-service training) and the implications for proactive teacher educators. An emerging proposed professional development model, *PROFESSIONAL*, is described and recommended as a cannon for reform. This paper is guided by the premise of teachers as professionals and needed vehicles for educational reform. Proactive teacher educators should seek a change in the traditional in-service training and create more authentic and empowering professional development opportunities.

Current Status

Bridging the gap between theory and practice while creating a dialogue for exploration, change, and growth is a growing need in the field of teacher education. Proactive professionals in the teacher education arena should enhance a commitment of service that entails the restructuring of professional development opportunities and in-service training. Many reform efforts and models of teaching and learning are evolving as we approach the new millennium. Unfortunately, implications of the emerging reform efforts are hindsights and teacher training is charged with the responsibility of equipping educators with the *tools for change*.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) has created an impetus for change in the structure of professional development. They assert:

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> **The school reform movement has ignored the obvious. New courses, tests, and curriculum reforms can be important starting points, but they are meaningless if teachers cannot use them productively. Policies can improve schools only if the people in them are armed with the knowledge, skills, and supports they need. Student learning in this country will improve only when we focus our efforts on improving teaching (p.5).**

When in-service, teacher training and professional development are ineffective and incompatible time fillers of the academic year, reform efforts are mere mirages of change. Metaphorically speaking, when the vehicles of change (teachers) are not properly serviced, the journey (classroom implementation) is difficult to complete. There are many concerns that have an explicit impact on equipping teachers with the essentials for implementing reform, such as the manner and time frame in which staff development is conducted. Often times, staff development consists of passive, after the regular work day, quick- fix workshops that require teachers to contribute additional personal time . Another issue of ineffective teacher training is the current models for staff development practices which are fragmented, faddish, passive, mandated and impractical. They fail to consider how teachers grow and change and tend not to provide teachers with a sense of efficacy (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996 & Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1996). Adult learning theories commonly proclaim that adults prefer to learn in problem-centered environments that relate problems to some significant aspect of their lives. More importantly, adults often prefer some degree of professional development training to come from their learning and experiences (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Call for Change

Any path that leads to effective education reform must pass through improved conceptions of professional development. Proactive professionals can pave the way of improved conceptions, thereby, creating professional development opportunities that are

proactive as well as effective. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1996) proclaim that the policy problem for professional development in this reform era extends beyond support for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills to providing teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their practice and incorporate new knowledge about content, pedagogy and learners. Quality education cannot exist in the absence of quality teaching and better education cannot be achieved without improved professional development opportunities (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Consequently, quality professional development opportunities and in-service training cannot exist without the efforts of proactive teacher educators.

Models of Change

Proactive teacher educators can be inspired to develop effective professional development models through the examination and analysis of the current status of staff development opportunities as well as recent postulated professional development models. For instance, Griffin's (1990) model of professional development outlines six characteristics of effective in- service training: *context-sensitivity* (needs of the site), *knowledge- based* (use of research, theory and practice), *ongoing* (cumulative), *developmental (* intellectually sound and thoughtful), *participative and collaborative* (empowers teachers), *purposeful*, and *analytic and reflective* (provide opportunity for participants to think and discourse). Succinctly, this model touts that professional development has to emerge and center around a sense of professional respect and regard to the teachers. The vehicle of educational reform must ride on the wheels of teacher professionalism. The acronym **PROFESSIONAL** has been developed (Langster, 1997) as an emerging model of effective professional development. A brief explanation of the model

is as follow: *Prepare* the teachers through the dissemination of the research or project. In other words, supply them with reading material that is not jargon laden but practical. Provide the teachers with an adequate opportunity to *Reflect* and react. Use faculty meeting and planning period times for the teachers to have the experience of *Observing* the proposed project or issue. This can be accomplished through video conferences or actual site observations. Allow the teachers to *Focus* on the issue and for the coordinator to filtrate or conduct training after the project or issue has been examined by the teachers and administrators. After conducting the training, give the teachers the opportunity to *Explore*, *Share* , and *Show* their experiences and options with their colleagues. Then, the teachers can effectively *Incorporate* the project or reform efforts based on their classroom characteristics. Once incorporation has taken place, *One* -on-one ongoing discourse among the teachers and coordinator should occur. Follow - up can be conducted during this phase followed by *Negotiating* (Networking) . The premises of negotiation should be encouraged to stem from *Action* research which will assist in *Legitimizing* concerns and efforts and empowering teachers as professionals. Evidence has been gathered to support the claim of teacher research (action research) being a productive avenue for professional development (Cochran-Smith & Kyle, 1996). With legitimization, teachers can look ahead and grasp change with a sense of professional preparedness.

Conclusion and Implications

The proposed emerging model , **PROFESSIONAL**, challenges proactive educators to comprehensively deliberate on multiple avenues of assisting teachers with reform efforts as well as a means of assuring effective professional development opportunities. A

change in thinking about teachers as professionals should precede a change in the structure of staff development. Teachers must be given more opportunities to engage in authentic professional practices that provide an avenue to redefine themselves as professionals. Strategic and aligned professional development activities are primary forces in the process of empowering and equipping teachers with the essentials for improvement, change and growth. The primary implication is the empowerment of teachers to become instrumental in their professional growth and to relinquish the traditional notion of being pawns of change to become vehicles of education reform.

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